



THE

Elders, Ministers and Messengers,

~~of the~~ Churches, &c. — Baptists, &c. —

OF THE SEVERAL

~~Western Association~~

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

MEETING AT

Exeter, Tiverton, Prescott, Wellington, Horfington, Sarum, Frome, Grittleton, Bratton, Calne, Melksham, Paulton, Pithay and Broad-mead Bristol, Sodbury, Cheltenham, Wotton, and Horfley: having received letters also from Falmouth, Chacewater, Plymouth, Kingsbridge, Bampton, Cullump-ton, Loughwood, Lyme, Bicknell, Yeovil, Crockerton, Trow-bridge, and Bradford: being met in Association at Horfley, in the county of Gloucester, June 10 and 11, 1778, to the several Churches they represent, send Christian Salutation.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

WE esteem it our highest honour to serve you in the Lord, and our peculiar joy to hear of your prosperity. We are glad to find by your letters, that all the associating churches continue steadfast in the faith; that, excepting a few, they enjoy the stated means of grace, and that some have received considerable additions: We wish we could inform you, that peace and prosperity abound in all.

Brother ISAAC HANN, after having comfortably associated with us for more than half a century, has at length quitted our society for that of the general assembly, and his grey hairs, for a crown of glory. We are all, both ministers and people, whether aged or young, ever hastening to the eternal world, where we must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, where every character and every heart must appear in its proper light, and where we must either suffer the just and awful indignation of a sin-avenging God, or enjoy the blissful smiles of our adorable Saviour, world without end.

Permit us therefore, Brethren, as your dying ministers, to address you as our dying people, with God and eternity full in view. O thou great Master of assemblies, fasten the advice of thy servants in every heart, as a nail in a sure place! It is with your spiritual and eternal interests, which we trust are dearer to us than our lives, that we are particularly concerned: to promote your spiritual welfare we pray, we study, we preach among you, we watch over you, and now most solemnly: exhort you in the name of the Lord. But what shall we add to our former epistles? Have we repeatedly exhibited to your view the harmonious per-

God—the holiness and perpetuity of his law—the adorable glories of Christ—the truths and promises of the gospel—the dreadful malignity of sin—the nature and importance of holiness—the several precepts of christianity—the misery of impenitent sinners—and the permanent happiness of real christians? The Searcher of hearts, and your own consciences, are best acquainted with the manner in which our former letters have been received and improved. You indeed attend the worship of God; you embrace evangelical truths; you profess the religion of Jesus, and appear concerned for its credit and support: All this affords us pleasure, attracts our esteem, and induces us to hope that you are heirs of salvation. But alas! how many are there who satisfy, and thereby deceive themselves with the bare externals of religion, while they are utter strangers to vital godliness! Permitted, Brethren, to entertain a godly jealousy over you: For though the lamps of many burn so bright, that we have no just reason to doubt of their being wise virgins; yet the lamps of others are so dim and languid, that we greatly fear, lest they should appear at last to be foolish virgins.

We are grieved at heart to behold signs of declension among you. Are not some unstable and wavering? Some lukewarm and inactive? Some light and trifling in their discourse? Some too much attached to the profits, pleasures, and honors of the world? Others rash and opinionative, of a censorious unforgiving spirit, directly opposite to the christian temper? The great truths which you profess to believe, are of a holy and heavenly nature, and calculated to mortify the body of sin in its various members, like our Lord's sentence on the barren fig-tree that withered in all its roots and branches, and to make you grow in grace, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness. We wish you not only clearly to understand the glorious truths of the gospel, but likewise experimentally and powerfully to feel their renewing energy, that you may be pure in heart, lowly in mind, heavenly in affections, favourable in conversation, holy in life, useful in the world, and divinely happy in your own souls.

That you may abound in the exercise of grace, in divine peace, in good works, and in holy thankfulness to the God of your salvation, we earnestly beseech you carefully to guard against all pernicious errors in doctrine experience and practice, and to bring all your religious sentiments, feelings, and actions, to the unerring test of God's word, our only infallible rule in matters of religion: Buy the truth cost what it will, and sell it not for all the world.

Draw no conclusions from the secret decrees of God, that are dishonourable to any of his attributes, inconsistent with the sacred scriptures, or in the least degree, productive of presumption on the one hand, or of despair on the other: Let the divine threatenings guard you against the former; and the divine promises preserve you from the latter: The moral law, which is as

immutable

immutable as its author the King eternal, forbids and condemns every sin, while the everlasting gospel promises pardon and salvation to every one that repents and believes; so that presumption and despair, which are equally destructive, are by the word of God equally forbidden. We wish you therefore, to have a clear, distinct, and *operative* knowledge of the precepts and sanction of the law, and of the fulness and freeness of the grace of the gospel, that you may carefully obey the command, and cheerfully confide in the promise, and so be kept at an equal distance from abominable libertinism and self-righteousness, from delusive hopes and slavish fears.

Content yourselves with no religion but that of the heart; which is founded in a divinely enlightened understanding, and consists in affections correspondent to the word and perfections of God. Be careful that you do not mistake some favourite notion for evangelical truth, natural passion for the work of the spirit, transient conviction for true repentance, a partial reformation for a thorough conversion, an orthodox creed for a living faith, a party spirit for christian zeal, and a warm imagination for spiritual joy. True grace illuminates the understanding, humbles the mind, purifies the heart, spiritualizes the affections, regulates the temper, determines the conduct, diffuses its influence thro' the whole man, is active, prevailing, immortal.

Carefully distinguish between faith and assurance, which some have injudiciously blended together. Faith is a humble confidence in the Son of God for eternal life, founded upon the declaration of the gospel, accompanied with a cordial approbation of the law of God, and may subsist with perplexing doubts respecting its truth and reality: Faith, which is the eye of the believing soul, may, like that of the body, clearly discern the object of its trust and delight, and not be able to behold itself. Place then your entire confidence in Christ for the whole of salvation: Let the declarations and promises of the gospel be your only warrant for believing in him; and consider your purest principles, happiest frames, and holiest duties, not as the foundation, but the superstructure of faith: Let not your sweetest experiences, which are at best but shallow cisterns, but Christ alone be the source of your comfort, and constantly live upon that inexhaustible fountain. Assurance is a personal application of the promise of eternal life to every one that believeth, applied by the operation of the holy Spirit, and enjoyed in the exercise of faith, love, and all the other graces, which constitute the christian temper: It has for its evidence an active faith and prevailing holiness; and is liable to be interrupted by innumerable imperfections, temptations and jealousies; and therefore its degrees must be exceedingly various in different believers, and in the same believer at different times: A christian spirit, the fruits of righteousness, and the continued exercise of grace, are the best evidences of a real conversion. Earnestly desire there-
fore

fore, dear Brethren, to attain and enjoy this precious privilege by a lively faith in Jesus Christ, and a conscientious discharge of every christian duty. The blossom of spiritual consolation is to be gathered only on the tree of righteousness: Prize the flower, but be chiefly concerned for the fruit. Self-love may incline us to desire comfort, but the love of God will make us thirst for purity. O be careful that your joy be the joy of the Holy Ghost, and dread that kind of assurance, if it may be so termed, which is not attended with holiness of heart and life, as the most dangerous and destructive delusion: For if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Do not confound but rightly distinguish between natural and moral inability: Natural inability is a defect in the natural powers, either of the body or mind, and is not, simply considered, chargeable with guilt: Moral inability, founded in the depravity of nature, is a disinclination to the love and enjoyment of God, which should be greatly lamented, and can be no excuse for the non-performance of duty.

Diligently watch against all hypocritical views in your performance of religious duties, formality and lukewarmness in your private devotions, vain imaginations in publick worship, a captious disposition in hearing the word, a worldly conversation on the holy sabbath, and a sensual temper thro' the whole of life: Set the Lord always before you, and approve your thoughts, words, and actions, to that holy and jealous God, who cannot be deceived, who will not be mocked, and who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Habituate yourselves to meditate on the objects of faith and the glories of heaven: Feast your souls on redeeming love: Drink deeper and deeper into the spirit of the gospel: Live to Christ: Die to the world: And let your christian temper, spiritual pursuits, and heavenly conversation shew, that you are strangers on the earth, heirs of God, and expectants of eternal glory.

Let truth and righteousness, love and charity be equally the objects of your warmest esteem, and in your pursuit of the one, be ever careful that you do not lose sight of the other: Detest all intolerant principles, while you zealously oppose every dangerous error: Proportionate your zeal to the importance of its object, and the strength of evidence by which it is revealed: Let those who are rigid, positive, self-conceited and censorious, if such there be among you, suspect at least, their pretensions to infallibility; let them calmly consider, that what they embrace as truth, may, in some instances, be error, and that the interest of the lowly Jesus should be ever supported with love and humility.

Studiously endeavour, by a diligent and prudent management of your worldly affairs, by an honest and harmless conversation, by a lowly and courteous deportment, universally to recommend the religion of Christ: Affectionately esteem all men as

your

your fellow-creatures, and all good men as your fellow-christians; and be truly concerned for the eternal welfare of your ignorant and perishing neighbours.

Let the stones and timber of your habitations bear witness to your upright, peaceable, and affectionate behaviour in your respective families and respective relations: Be in reality in your own houses, what you appear to be in the house of the Lord: And let the duties of the closet, and the family keep pace with your secular employments.

In the house of God conduct yourselves as the children of God: Be exceedingly careful that you neither give nor take offence; timely extirpate every root of bitterness; follow the things that make for peace; provoke one another to love and benevolence; bear one another's burden; sympathize with the weak, the afflicted and tempted; make proper allowances for different capacities; let truth and love be the bond of union; and let each contribute to the welfare of the whole. Let the authority of Christ preside in your church meetings, and let his word, example, and spirit be the rule, and his glory the end of your church-discipline: While you carefully maintain order, truth, and purity, dread and discountenance, a selfish, froward, over-bearing temper, as absolutely contrary to the genius of the gospel, exceedingly injurious to the interest of christianity, and productive of discord in the church of God: Officers in particular, and private members in general, should take heed that nothing be done thro' strife, or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let meekness and charity rule in your hearts; let the image of Christ adorn your minds; and let your conversation shine in your respective neighbourhoods. O, Brethren! we wish, we long to see the city of our solemnities a quiet habitation, uniform, beautiful, and shining, the very suburbs of the heavenly Jerusalem.

We heartily join with you in lamenting the present melancholly state of the empire, and in earnestly recommending our King and country to the blessing and protection of Almighty God; in his providence and grace may we cheerfully trust, and meet at length in his glorious kingdom. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers; and shut thy doors about thee: Hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always, by all means, and preserve you blameless unto the coming of Jesus Christ, The Lord be with you all.

Signed at the unanimous
request of the assembly,
by the Moderator.

CALEB EVANS.

B R E V I A T E S.

WEDNESDAY afternoon at three o'clock, Ministers, Messengers, &c. met according to appointment, Brother *Pyne* of *Devizes* prayed—the preliminaries of the association were read.—Brother *C. Evans* was chosen MODERATOR—the letters from the churches were read—minutes of their contents taken—Brother *B. Francis* desired to draw up the General letter—Brother *Philips*, of *Sarum* prayed.—The assembly then adjourned to HALF PAST SIX. The service was opened by singing a suitable hymn. Brother *Enoch Francis* prayed. Brother *Day* preached from *Isai.* 64. 8. *But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father.* After singing, Brother *J. Stephens* closed the service in prayer.

THURSDAY MORNING SEVEN O'CLOCK, our Brethren, *Taylor*, *M. Harris*, *Ferrabee*, and *S. Duncombe*, succeeded each other in prayer. The General letter was then read, unanimously approved, and at the request of the assembly signed by the Moderator. This service was concluded in prayer by our Brother *Alfop*.

ATTEN opened the public service, by singing as before. Brother *Sotteridge* prayed. Brother *Sprague* prayed. Our Brother *C. Evans* preached from *Matt.* 5. 47. *What do ye more than others?* Brother *Day* prayed. Brother *Kingdon* preached from *2. Cor.* 4. 6. *For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Sang at the usual intervals of worship, and closed the PUBLIC SERVICE in prayer by our Brother *H. Evans*.

AT FOUR, the Ministers and Messengers assembled again. The state of the small but increasing ASSOCIATION FUND was laid before them by the Moderator. It appeared that the balance in hand, exclusive of this year's collections, was FIFTY pounds and four-pence. That there had been upwards of thirty pounds expended out of this fund, including the profits arising from the sale of the annual letter; that the above balance of fifty pounds was for the present locked up in an edition of *Catechisms* for the use of the churches, and that the amount of the collections this year was 22l. 14s.

Brother *Day* reported, that he had it in charge from our deceased Brother *Hann*, when on his dying bed, to return the Association his most affectionate thanks for the kind assistance they had afforded him out of this fund, and for all their acts of liberality and brotherly love towards him. The assembly in return, unanimously expressed their grateful joy, that it had been in their power to relieve and comfort in his declining years, so venerable a Brother, who had long been an ornament to his charac-

their

ter in general, and to the Baptist denomination, and this assembly in particular.

Several applications were then made from different churches, for some assistance from this fund towards repairing their respective places of worship, and TWENTY-ONE GUINEAS were voted for that purpose.—The Moderator was also desired out of this fund to purchase 250 of the Nonconformist's Catechism, by Mr. Palmer of Hackney, and to distribute them amongst the associated churches.—And it was further agreed to assist in a mission to Cornwall; and to defray any expence our Brethren might be at, on account of VILLAGE PREACHING, which it is the earnest wish of this association to encourage as much as possible.

Agreed, cordially to unite in any respectful application that may be made to parliament, to repeal the penal statutes against Protestant Dissenters, and to enlarge the terms of the act of toleration; the present time, being in the opinion of this association, proper for that purpose.

Agreed, to recommend the church at Falmouth in Cornwall, as highly worthy encouragement. The interest there, if properly supported, it appears to this association, is likely to be considerable. Their present large and commodious place of worship has brought them into debt upwards of eighty pounds, which they want assistance to discharge: as also the assistance of the funds, to enable them comfortably to support a minister.—The church at Melksham, Wilts, finding it necessary to add galleries to their new place of worship, agreed to recommend their case to such of the churches to whom they have not already applied for assistance.

Agreed, That we are obliged to our Brethren, who constitute the several other associations in this kingdom for their ready compliance with our request, of opening a friendly correspondence with them; that we hope for the continuance of such correspondence; and humbly recommend it to their consideration, whether their associations might not be improved by the establishment of a *similar fund*, with that which has been lately formed by this association; the plan of which, the Secretary is desired to lay before them.

Agreed, Earnestly to request the churches in this association, to endeavour to be peculiarly serious and solemn in their observation of days of humiliation and prayer, as the Lord appears so evidently to have a controversy with this guilty nation, and our circumstances are so truly alarming.

Agreed, To hold the next Association at Exon. To begin WEDNESDAY afternoon THREE o'clock, in the week AFTER the Whitsun week, it being inconvenient to our friends at Exon, to have the meeting in the Whitsun week, on account of a great fair at that time. Our Brethren, B. Francis and C. Evans to preach the sermons, or in case of failure our Brother Day.

The Association was then finally closed in prayer by the Moderator.

Since the last Association, the accounts sent from the Churches, are as follow.

Baptized	131
Received by letter from other Churches	8
	139
Dead	64
Dismissed to other Churches	10
Excluded	5
	79
Increase	60

N. B. The increase in this association in the year 1777, was 21. In the *Leicestershire* association 17. In the *Welsh* 119. In the *Midland* 24.—Total 181. The Eastern association does not mention the increase. And in several parts of the country the sister Churches hold fellowship by a circular double lecture during the summer half year; but have no annual Association, so that an exact account of their state could not be procured. In the general, we have the happiness to learn that they are upon the increase.

✂ *Wilson's Scripture Manual* at 7s. 6d. per hundred—Baptist Catechism ditto—with the Scripture Proofs, 15s. per hundred—Scripture Exposition of the Catechism, by our Brother *Beddome* 1s. in canvas,—1s. 3d. in sheep, and 1s. 6d. in calf:—To be had by applying to our Brother *C. Evans*, No. 3, *Montague-street, Bristol*.—As also the new Collection of Hymns with a Supplement, the third edition, 3s. in sheep—3s. 6d. in calf. To those who take six together a seventh will be allowed gratis.

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